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BOOK REVIEWS.

All book reviews are by the editor in chief unless otherwise expressly stated.

Virginia Colonial Decisions. Vols. I and II. The Reports of Sir John Randolph and by Edward Barradall of Decisions of the General Court of Virginia 1728-1741. Edited with Historical Introduction by R. T. Barton. Boston, Massachusetts. The Boston Book Co. 1909.

We believe the late William Green, Esq., probably one of the most erudite lawyers America has ever produced, was the only lawyer of our time to whom a volume of reports was more entertaining reading than any other book in the world. Every book he possessed was annotated and re-annotated in that strange handwriting of his which looked like the script of the blackletter days. He was the possessor of a volume of MSS. reports of Virginia cases taken by Edward Barradall, Esq., which at his sale was allowed to wander out of the State, finding its final resting place in Harvard College Library. Another copy of this MSS. was once owned by Mr. Conway Robinson and is now in the State Law Library at Richmond. From this latter MSS. with notes from the Green MSS. and from a MSS. copy of the report of some forty cases made by Sir John Randolph, the Boston Book Company, with the aid of Hon. R. T. Barton of the Winchester, Va., bar, has published two attractive volumes, to which Mr. Barton adds an historical introduction. We can imagine the delight with which Mr. Green would have poured over these two books had he seen them for the first time in print, and we can safely say that there can be but very few Virginians who will not, with a delight equal to that of Mr. Green over a blackletter volume, peruse the charming and learned introduction with which Mr. Barton has prefaced them. It is a history of Colonial Virginia in miniature, which occupying some 250 pages contains "infinite riches in a little room." The chapter on "The Law and Lawyers," and on "Courts" of those early days is one no Virginia lawyer should fail to read, and which no lawyer, wherever he dwells, can fail to enjoy. The cases themselves contain no opinions of the court, but give merely the statement of the case, arguments of counsel—the latter very often only on one side—and the decision pro or con. Their usefulness today is more historical than practical, but many interesting cases upon ejectment, the construction of wills or deeds, trespass, slander, and the ownership or right to slaves are recorded. Some rather amusing cases are found in the inextricable difficulties arising from the repeated (and sometimes at amazingly short intervals) marriages of widows—often to widowers. And yet who can tell when one of these cases might not prove to be authority? But the other day in England—as noticed editorially—a case was dismissed upon the authority of a decision rendered in 1676.

But pure usefulness is not everything in the world. Here are two volumes of ancient cases which are valuable in furnishing a most interesting picture of colonial life not to be found elsewhere, and prefacing them an introduction which in a brief, but delightful way, affords a glimpse of early Virginia, which one can read, if one wills, in a couple of hours, but which no one who desires information coupled with enjoyment, will desire to peruse hastily.